

CERCLA UPDATE

Selenium Investigations in Southeast Idaho



Environmental Investigations underway at our Mine Sites in Southeast Idaho

Dear Interested Citizen:

In cooperation with other state, federal, and tribal agencies, the IDEQ and the EPA are beginning environmental investigations at four mine sites in Southeast Idaho.

For more information, contact:

Conda Mine:

Margie English

Conda Mine contact

IDEQ State Office

(208) 373-0306

Margaretha.English@deq.idaho.gov

Fran Allans

EPA, Idaho Operations Office

(208) 378-5775

Allans.Fran@epamail.epa.gov

Ballard, Enoch Valley and Henry Mines:

Michael Rowe

P4 Mines contact

DEQ Pocatello Regional Office

(208) 236-6160

Michael.Rowe@deq.idaho.gov

Dave Tomten

EPA, Idaho Operations Office

(208) 378-5763

Tomten.Dave@epa.gov

District-wide:

Carol Cole

Community Involvement Coordinator

(208) 557-7897

ccole@northwind-inc.com

Selenium Investigations in Southeast Idaho

http://www/deq.idaho.gov/waste/prog_issues/mining/selenium.cfm

March 2009

Introduction

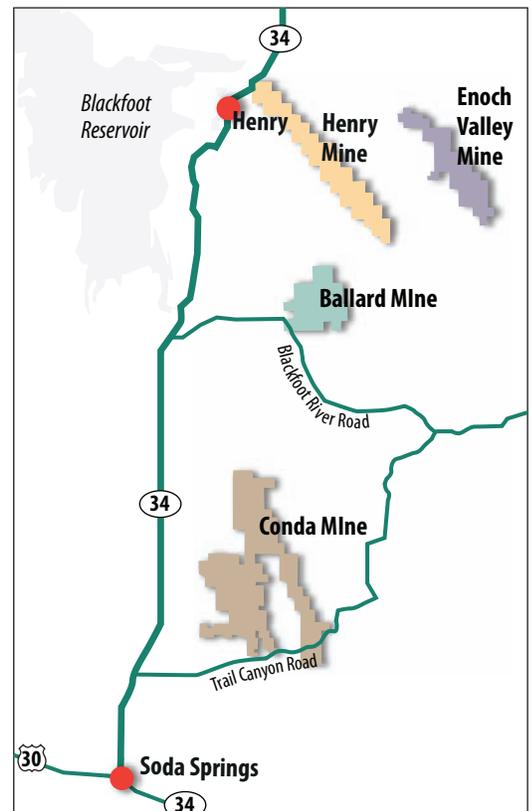
Investigations of contamination at four mine sites in Southeast Idaho have begun under oversight of Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other state, federal and Tribal agencies:

- The former Conda/Woodall Mountain Phosphate Mine (Conda Mine) located approximately 8 miles northeast of Soda Springs, Idaho, in Caribou County
- Ballard Mine, about 12 miles north of Soda Springs
- Enoch Valley Mine, about 19 miles northeast of Soda Springs
- Henry Mine, about 15 miles north of Soda Springs and about 4 miles southeast of Henry, Idaho.

The J. R. Simplot Company, with state and federal oversight, is investigating the Conda site under state law and the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). P4 Production, a wholly owned subsidiary of Monsanto Company, is investigating the Ballard, Enoch Valley, and Henry mines, also under state law and CERCLA. As past operators of these inactive mines, Simplot and P4 Production will each perform a remedial investigation/feasibility study (RI/FS) to look for and assess contamination from selenium and/or other trace metals resulting from mining, evaluate any associated threats to human health or the environment, and develop and analyze cleanup options.

Site History and Environmental Background

Southeast Idaho is one of the world's major phosphate producing regions, and phosphate mining has been an important industry here since the early 20th century. In Caribou and adjacent counties, phosphate mining at a number of sites, including these four mines, has resulted in overburden disposal areas that contain materials high in naturally occurring selenium and other trace metals. Various past studies – including



voluntary mining company investigations, area-wide investigations, and others – have identified these overburden disposal areas as sources of hazardous substances that may pose a risk to human health and/or the environment. These contaminants are known or suspected to be present in groundwater, surface water, sediment, soils, and vegetation. In addition, surface water, groundwater, bioaccumulation in plants, and air can transport these contaminants beyond the former mining areas.

The CERCLA Process and Remedial Investigations/Feasibility Studies

CERCLA is the law passed by the U.S. Congress in 1980 to address cleanup of releases of oil pollution and hazardous substances throughout the country. Enacted after the discovery of toxic waste dumps such as Love Canal, CERCLA allows EPA to clean up sites and to compel responsible parties to perform cleanups or reimburse the government for them. Under Executive Orders 12580 and 13016, the President delegated authority to federal agencies to conduct various activities under CERCLA, including investigations and response activities. Authorized federal agencies have the authority to conduct a RI/FS or remedial removal action where immediate action needs to be taken, enforce against potentially responsible parties, ensure community involvement, involve states, and ensure long-term protectiveness.

The purpose of a RI/FS is to gather enough information to characterize a release, then develop and analyze alternatives to remediate releases in compliance with laws and regulations. For the Conda, Ballard, Enoch Valley, and Henry mines, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and other agencies need additional information about aquatic and terrestrial species, reclamation conditions, and groundwater characteristics.

CERCLA and Community Involvement

CERCLA community involvement guidelines accept the principle that members of the public affected by a cleanup site have a right to know about activities taking place in their community and to have a say in the decision-making process. But community involvement is more than just a requirement: it is a key to successful completion of a cleanup project. Community interviews during the early stages of a project ensure that agencies have an accurate picture of past site operations as well as residents' concerns and interests. The agencies, Tribes, and mining companies participating in the RI/FS for Conda, Ballard, Henry, and Enoch Valley mines welcome public involvement in the process because they believe it ultimately produces better decisions.

CERCLA also requires that information developed, received, published or made available to the public related to response actions be available for public inspection and copying at an information repository at or near the site. Documents related to the environmental investigations and clean up plans at these mine sites will be available for review at the IDEQ Pocatello Regional Office, 444 Hospital Way, #300 Pocatello, ID 83201. For document requests, contact Kasey Guthrie in writing at this address, by email at Kasey.Guthrie@deq.idaho.gov, or by phone at 208-236-6160 or 888-655-6160 (toll free).

What is selenium?

Selenium is a naturally occurring mineral element that is widely present in nature in most rocks and soils. It has both beneficial and harmful effects: low doses help to maintain good health, but exposure to high levels can cause adverse health effects in humans and other animals. Elevated levels of selenium and other potentially hazardous trace metals have been detected on and near phosphate mines in Southeast Idaho.

The CERCLA process at the Conda and P4 (Ballard, Enoch Valley and Henry) mines

